

GREEK MYTHOLOGY

A FASCINATING GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE
ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION WITH ITS GODS,
GODDESSES, MONSTERS AND MORTALS



MATT CLAYTON

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***A Fascinating Guide to Understanding the Ancient
Greek Religion with Its Gods, Goddesses, Monsters
and Mortals***

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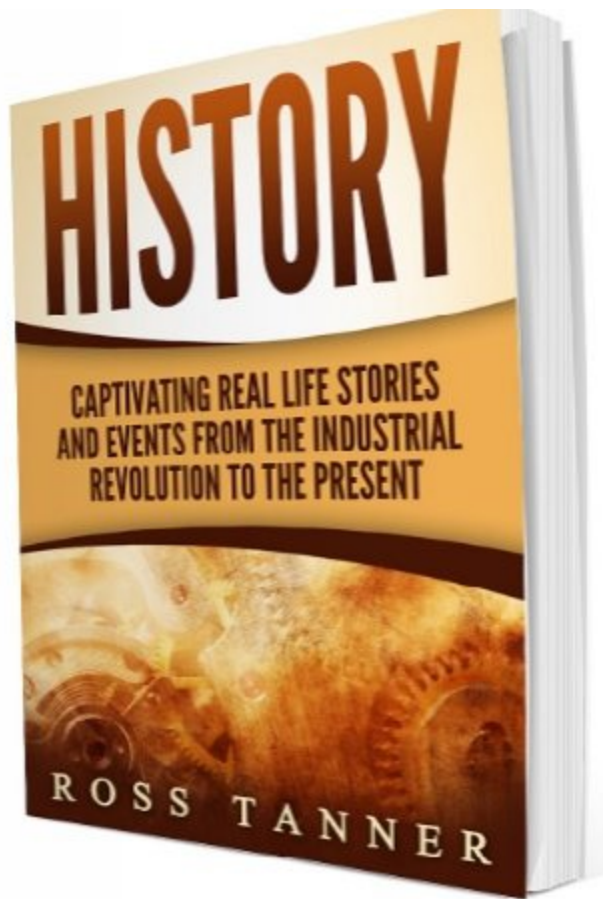
Captivating Stories of the Gods, Sagas and Heroes

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Introduction — At the Edge of History

The ancient Greeks were explorers in many ways. They traveled to new places, creating colonies in strange lands far from their original homes. They were survivors. They were honorable thieves. They used their cunning to explore the frontiers of philosophy and they wrested from the chaos of the surrounding wilderness the building blocks of civilization.

Though the Greeks were late to the game of writing, what they wrote became an important part of our world's heritage.

Greek heroes taught us many lessons, from Homer's poetry about war and a warrior's return home, to the tales of Cadmus, Jason, Herakles and even Oedipus.

The myths of Greek heroes give us a glimpse beyond the edge of history, into the lives of very real people. How much of their tales are true, we may never know. But this book will present their tales in a new light, hopefully making their experiences a bit more real and perhaps shining a light on what may have really happened behind the distortions of time and generations of misunderstanding.

This book is broken into four parts. The first will explore Greek heroes, what they were like and what they accomplished.

The second part of the book will tackle Greek religion—the gods and goddesses which establish the backdrop against which Greek legends were formed.

In the third part of the book, we take a close look at the myths of Greek monsters.

And finally, in the fourth part, we explore the possible meaning behind the literal words of Greek mythology.

Early in the written history of ancient Greece, we have the great Athenian lawgiver, Solon. He attempted to tame the unruly beast within the heart of

each Greek hero. They were selfish, each and every one of them. But they also had a code of honor that helped them rein in their selfishness. So, we will end the book with Solon, who established laws so unpopular with the wicked that the lawgiver left Athens on an extended vacation so that others would not be able to talk him out of the laws he had handed down. But we will start with the heroes who came before Greek history began.

Part 1 — Greek Heroes

Chapter 1 — Honorable Thieves

There was no nation called Greece in ancient times. The Greek people possessed a common heritage and language, but they lived in separate city states that were as different as night and day. Athens, for instance, valued philosophy, wisdom and individual liberty. Sparta, on the other hand, valued strength and austerity. To the Spartans, if a child looked weak or deformed, it was left in the wilderness to die. The Spartans built a fierce, land-based military force. The Athenians built a strong naval force. When they worked together, the Greeks were a powerful enemy to whomever might threaten them. During other times, they fought amongst themselves, vying for power over their fellows.

When Greece gained a written language, its culture had already lived through a thousand years of heroism and exploits. The details of that past came down to us as myth and legend.

Those stories tell us a lot about the Greeks of prehistory. They cared about honor. They wanted to do something important with their lives. But they weren't above outright theft to achieve their otherwise honorable goals.

Jason of Iolcos was one such hero. His father, Aeson, was the rightful king of that city state, but before Jason was born, Aeson's half-brother, Pelias, seized the throne, killing everyone who could challenge him as king.

Pelias had grown up arrogant and power hungry. The knowledge that he was the son of their common mother, Tyro, and the god of the sea, Poseidon, must have made him feel he deserved to be king more than his older, half-brother. Pelias wanted to conquer the entire region surrounding Iolcos—all of Thessaly. But his selfish ambitions led to his undoing.

Ironically, Pelias spared his half-brother—the deposed king, locking him away in the dungeon. He also spared Aeson's wife, Alcimedé. When she bore her husband a son, named Jason, she had her handmaidens gather around the baby and weep as if the child had been stillborn. This was sufficient to fool Pelias and to save young Jason's life.

Fearing that Pelias would one day discover and kill her son, Alcimede sent one of her handmaidens to take the infant to the centaur, Chiron. There, on Mount Pelion, nearby in southeast Thessaly, Jason was to be raised and educated by the same wise centaur who had trained Perseus, Theseus, Achilles, Herakles, Ajax and many other heroes of Greece.

Over the years, Pelias grew increasingly concerned that he would be overthrown. Perhaps his own guilt for his crimes were catching up with him. He sought the advice of an oracle who told him to beware of a man wearing only one sandal.

When Jason had become a man, he left Chiron and Mount Pelion and made his way home. On the way, he encountered an old woman standing in the shallow water of a river.

“Madam, do you need to cross?” he asked.

“Oh, bless you. Yes, but I’m afraid I might drown in the fast moving water.”

“Here,” replied Jason. “If you don’t mind, I’ll carry you across.”

“You are so kind.”

Halfway across the river, one of Jason’s sandals became trapped in the mud. He yanked his foot loose, but the sandal stayed. Jason had been trained not to concern himself with such things. Right now, his mission was assisting the old woman. The sandal was a minor casualty of that mission.

After he finished crossing the river, the old woman thanked him and she went on her way. Jason continued on the road toward Iolcos, on the coast of the Pagasetic Gulf.

Little did Jason know, but the old woman was a disguise. She was none other than the beautiful queen of the gods, Hera—wife of Zeus, king of the gods. She’d had a longstanding grudge against Pelias. When Jason’s uncle had taken the throne, he had killed his mother’s stepmother, Sidero, because the old woman had abused his own mother. The old woman had sought refuge in Hera’s temple, but Pelias killed her anyway, soiling the most holy place of the queen goddess. Hera made certain that Pelias would discover the prophecy of the man with one sandal. Then, she went about ensuring that Jason would lose one of his sandals during his return to Iolcos.

When Jason arrived in Iolcos, Pelias was throwing a festival in honor of his father, Poseidon, god of the seas. Everyone from throughout the region had been summoned to participate in the sacrifice to Poseidon and to indulge in the festivities which were a tribute to the sea god. When Jason entered the town, one of the guards announced his arrival as a man wearing one sandal.

Pelias was petrified with fear. This day was to be the confrontation he had long dreaded. Uncertain how to proceed and paranoid about what the young man might do, the king called the young man before him. He wanted to make a show out of this meeting, with the security of all of his own guards looking on.

“What is your name?” asked Pelias.

“My name is Jason, your highness.”

“Welcome, Jason.” Pelias thought for a moment and decided to be bold. “I have a riddle for you. If you were confronted by someone who would lead to your own downfall, what would you do to the man?”

Jason was surprised that the king would ask such a question without knowing who he was. His mind raced to think of an answer. He thought of all the lessons Chiron had taught him, but nothing had prepared him for such an odd query. Hera turned herself invisible and whispered in the young man’s ear, telling him the answer he should give.

“Sire, I would send him in search of the Golden Fleece—the magical, healing blanket that Phrixus took to the ends of the Earth, beyond the Euxine Sea.”

Pelias was stunned that this young man—this threat to his crown—would name a quest as impossible as this.

“So, your highness, did you think that I would lead to your downfall? Did you recognize your own nephew?”

This revelation stunned Pelias even further, but he had already steeled himself to this challenge. He nodded slowly and replied, “Nephew, I hereby give you this challenge by your own suggestion. You are to return with the Golden Fleece, and then I will happily turn over the throne to you.”

Jason accepted the challenge. He knew not how he would accomplish such a quest, because he had never before traveled.

First, the young man looked for a ship that could carry him to the mythical land of Colchis. At the docks, he found a shipbuilder named Argo who was adding the finishing touches to a fine ship under construction. By this time, everyone had heard of Jason's confrontation with the king. They all knew of his quest.

"Sire," said Argo, "it would give me great honor to bestow on you this humble ship to help you on your quest. I have only one request—that I be allowed to be a part of your crew."

"The honor is mine, Argo," replied Jason. "This is indeed a beautiful ship. Your skills will be a welcome addition to the crew. I shall name this wonderful creation, the Argo, after its creator."

Over the next several days, Jason sent word out that he was looking for a crew to man his ship. From far and wide, many Greek heroes who lived at that time found their way to Iolcos to offer their services. Among them were Herakles, Peleus, Orpheus, the twins Castor and Pollux, Atalanta and several others. The ones selected included the Boreads—sons of the North Wind, Boreas. Jason called this elite crew, the Argonauts.

After they set sail, the Argo landed on the Isle of Lemnos, on the other side of the Aegean Sea, nestled against the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), and standing in front of the Hellespont.

Lemnos was populated by a cursed group of women. They had earned the hatred of Aphrodite, goddess of love, because the women had failed in their duties of worship. In retribution, Aphrodite had made the women reek of a stench so foul that their husbands had not been able to stand being near them. Their husbands, had grown rowdy and had taken for themselves concubines from Thrace on the mainland of Greece. Because of the men's betrayal, the women had killed them in their sleep.

When the Argo arrived, the women were anxious for companionship. They seduced the Argonauts and gave birth to a new race of men—the Minyae. Even Jason participated in the frolicking, and had twins with the queen of Lemnos.

Herakles, the demigod, and strongest man alive, was able to resist the temptations of the Lemnosian women. The Argo's voyage had barely begun, and the men had become distracted by these lonely women. Finally, he was able to convince his fellow Argonauts to return to their ship.

Next, the Argo landed in the realm of the Doliones. King Cyzicus celebrated their arrival by throwing a feast in their honor. During their dinner, the king told them that they could get plenty of supplies beyond Bear Mountain. The king forgot to mention, though, that the Gegeines inhabited that land. They were a group of giants, each with six arms. While many of the Argonauts sought their supplies, the Gegeines attacked the ship, but were fought back by Herakles. The demigod killed most of them, before Jason and the others returned.

To keep from being attacked again, Jason had the Argo shove off, despite the fact that it was mid-evening. Ironically, they ended up unwittingly landing where they had started earlier that day, near the palace of King Cyzicus. In the darkness of night, the Doliones thought they were being assaulted and attacked the Argonauts. By dawn, many Doliones lay dead, including the king. The queen, in her grief, killed herself. When the Argonauts realized that they had killed their former host, they were deeply saddened. To make up for their horrible mistake, they took the time to hold a proper funeral for the king and for those Doliones they had slaughtered.

Later that day, Jason and the Argonauts found their way across the Aegean, again, to Thrace and the kingdom of Salmydessus. When they reached the palace of King Phineas, they learned that the monarch had fallen out of favor with Zeus, king of the gods. Each day, Zeus sent harpies to snatch the food from the king's table so that he grew more and more emaciated from starvation. Jason and his crew took pity on the king and helped him destroy the giant birds with women's faces. For the first time in months, King Phineas was able to finish a meal in peace.

Phineas was so grateful, he told Jason how to find his way to Colchis, and how to pass safely through the Symplegades, or "clashing rocks."

In the narrow strait which led from the Aegean to the Euxine (Black) Sea, the Symplegades were two cliffs which came together whenever a ship passed by, crushing it between them. Phineas had suggested that Jason let

loose a dove just before entering between the clashing rocks. If the dove was able to make it through, the Argonauts should row with all their might. But if the dove was crushed between the cliffs, then the Argo would not have any chance of survival between them. When Jason released the dove, he saw that it survived.

“Row, men! Row as if your lives depend on it.”

The Argo barely made it past the Symplegades and with only minor damage to the stern. As they looked back at the dangerous gauntlet, they saw that the cliffs had become fused in place so that ships would now be forever capable of making it through safely.

From the Bosphorus, across the northern edge of Asia Minor and to the farthest shores of the East, the Argo finally came to rest in Colchis, land of the Golden Fleece.

King Aeëtes and his people greeted Jason and his men. The travelers were treated as honored guests. The people of Colchis had so rarely received visitors from Greece or other parts of the Mediterranean, because of the dangers of the Symplegades.

At the meal in their honor, the king asked, “Why have you traveled all this way. Why do you honor us with your presence?”

“We are on a quest,” replied Jason. “We seek the Golden Fleece. I am the rightful heir to the throne of Iolcos, but King Pelias requires that I return with this prize before he will relinquish the throne to me.”

King Aeëtes tried not to look concerned. He swallowed with difficulty and attempted to think of a way to handle this sudden problem. These warriors were here to steal the national treasure and open conflict might result in too much bloodshed. He knew that he needed to appear accommodating to these guests, while at the same time protecting his own country from these thieves.

“I would be happy to give you the Golden Fleece, if you would first perform three tasks. This is for you, and you alone.”

“What are they?” asked Jason.

“First, you must yoke our two fire-breathing bulls and plow a four-acre field with them.”

Already, Jason felt overwhelmed by this impossible task. But he knew he could not leave Colchis without the Golden Fleece.

“Next, you must sow the same field with dragon’s teeth. From the ground will spring an army of soldiers. You must kill them all.”

“Last of all, you must kill the dragon which guards the Golden Fleece.”

“Thank you, King Aeëtes. I accept your challenge. Today, I will pray to the gods and prepare myself. Tomorrow, I will perform your tasks.”

In private, Jason talked to his men about the three tasks and how he might survive each of them. They heard a knock at the door and Euphemus went to answer it. Jason recognized the princess Medea, and he bade her to enter.

“Prince Jason, may I talk with you alone?”

Jason looked to his men, but did not receive any help from them. He nodded. “Okay. Men, please give us a few minutes alone.”

Again, Hera had stepped in to help her hero. She had asked Aphrodite to have her son Eros aim one of his arrows at Medea and to get her to fall in love with Jason. The smitten princess was now here to betray her own people.

When the Argonauts had left, Medea turned to Jason and said, “My dearest prince, I can help you with the tasks my father gave you.”

The young prince shook his head in disbelief. “Why would you betray your own people?”

“I have never met anyone like you. The men of my country are all soft and weak. They don’t have the courage you exhibit. I—I think you should have the Golden Fleece.”

“I still don’t understand. Why are you helping me?”

“Do you believe in love?” Medea stepped closer to Jason and looked up into his eyes.

Jason could feel his heart pounding. Her perfume filled his nostrils. The beauty of her face filled his eyes with feeling. “Love? But we’ve barely met.”

“Are you ready when opportunity presents itself? Are you brave enough to act when everything that gives your life meaning suddenly becomes possible? I’ve been waiting all my life for you to arrive.”

Suddenly, Jason took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. She returned the kiss with an equal amount of feeling. After several minutes of passion, Jason stepped back from her and held her at arm’s length. “One moment.”

The young prince went to the door, opened it and looked over his men waiting there. “Back to your own rooms. We have a solution for tomorrow. I will see you all in the morning.”

Again, he closed the door and turned back to Medea. “So, tell me. How can you help with my tasks?”

The following morning, the Argonauts returned to Jason’s room, waiting just outside his door. A few minutes after their arrival, both Jason and Medea emerged.

They all had their breakfast, and then the royal courtiers, king, Medea and dozens of citizens went to the field that was to be plowed. Jason lathered his hands and forearms with a lotion Medea had supplied him. These protected him from being burned as he yoked the two fire-breathing bulls. Then, he easily plowed the four acres. Next, he sowed the dragon’s teeth across a large part of the field. Minutes later, warriors sprang up from the earth. But before they could turn on Jason, he threw a magic stone into the midst of them and they suddenly turned on one another until only one was left. But he was exhausted and Jason easily defeated him.

Next, Jason and his men made their way to the glade where the great oak tree stood, decorated with the Golden Fleece and protected by a golden dragon. When they arrived, Medea was standing nearby. She nodded to Jason and he walked right past the dragon and took the Golden Fleece without being molested by the dragon. Medea had used her magic to put the great creature to sleep.

Quickly, Jason took the Golden Fleece and ran with the Argonauts down to the Argo and prepared to set sail. Not far behind them, the king and his soldiers chased after them.

Prince Apsyrtus, Medea's brother, was the first to arrive at the docks after the Argo had pushed off. He and his men were right behind the Argo and were quickly catching up.

Suddenly, Medea, riding the dragon, swooped down and thrashed Apsyrtus's ship, cutting it into pieces. King Aeëtes and the rest of the men, in the other ships, had to stop to rescue the prince and his men.

Even after returning with the Golden Fleece, Pelias resisted living up to his end of the bargain. In the meantime, Medea used her magic to make Jason's father younger and stronger, despite his years wasting away in the dungeon.

When Pelias's daughters saw this, they asked Medea to do the same for their father. Medea suggested, instead, that their father could go even further and become a young man, again. She took an old goat, cut it into pieces and tossed the pieces into a cauldron. Out jumped a young lamb.

So, the daughters cut up their father, tossed the pieces into the same cauldron, and waited for Medea to do her magic. But she refused. Pelias's son, Acastus, used his soldiers to drive Jason and Medea from Iolcos for his father's murder.

Understanding Jason's Story

Ironically, Jason and Medea did not murder Pelias. His own daughters had killed him. And Acastus's father had betrayed his oath to Jason by not turning over the kingdom to him promptly upon Jason's return. Pelias had lied. But the kingdom was lawfully Jason's anyway, with his father's forced retirement. Pelias had stolen the kingdom from Aeson, Jason's father. Pelias had been a thief and Jason had become a thief in order to resolve that earlier theft.

Jason had added to the crimes of the story by his intention of stealing the Golden Fleece from the people of Colchis. And the Greeks thought this was perfectly okay to do. Ultimately, Jason did not have to steal it, because Medea had betrayed her own people to help Jason. But what if King Aeëtes

had refused to give the Golden Fleece to Jason? Would Jason have murdered the king and his soldiers to force his will in the matter?

If Jason had merely demanded that the throne be returned to his father or to himself, Pelias likely would have had Jason killed. For what is one more murder by Pelias after so many others? In the end, Pelias lost all honor by his selfishness and lying.

Jason started out as a righteous hero, headed toward reclaiming his lost heritage. But he ended up betraying all that. For all he had promised to Medea for helping him, and for bearing him two beautiful sons, he asked the princess of Corinth for her hand in marriage. The young prince had been blinded by political greed—a hunger for power. By marrying the princess, he figured he'd have an extra advantage that he could not have enjoyed by being weighted down by Medea, his foreign princess. Jason had stolen the Golden Fleece in an honorable fashion, passing the tasks given to him by King Aeëtes. But in the end, Jason died poor and alone because of his betrayal of Medea.

To the Greeks, some actions are dishonorable. Stealing for a righteous cause seems to have been one act they held as honorable. But lying and betraying promises went too far for both Pelias and Jason.

Chapter 2 — Legends of Pride

The Greeks had a unique advantage over most other nations. Though their land was relatively poor compared to the Nile Valley or Mesopotamia, the fact that so many of their cities were close to the sea gave them a psychological advantage over the people of other nations.

Robert C. Lamm and Neil M. Cross, in their book, *The Humanities in Western Culture, Ed. IX*, comment on the Aegean heritage given to the world by the Greeks. “There appear to be several constants that run through all cultures: seaports are, by their nature, urban centers, cities that are more receptive to change than are rural areas; those who travel are generally more open to innovative ideas and foreign customs than those who habitually stay home, especially farmers. In many cases there seems to be a consistent equation: the farther a person is from the seacoast, the more resistant that person will be to change and new ideas.

“Throughout history, civilizations have evolved to levels that were largely determined by their developments in urban living, commerce, trade, and travel. Considering all these factors, it is hardly surprising—much less miraculous—that civilizations in the Aegean reached such high levels.”

First the Mycenaean Greeks and then the Dorians (like Sparta) and Ionians (like Athens) took advantage of the high mix of land and sea throughout the region. A large part of Ancient Greece consisted of islands, peninsulas and coastlines.

With an abundance of port cities and relatively poor farmland, the Greeks became traders, travelers and colonists. At the height of Ancient Greek civilization, before Alexander the Great conquered a large part of the known world, the Greek world included coastal settlements from Eastern Spain to the Eastern Black Sea. The cities of Odessa, Ukraine and Marseilles, France were both originally Greek colonies. So was Byzantium (modern Istanbul).

With so much travel going on through the Greek realm, it’s no wonder that they had many legends of heroes and great accomplishments.

Legend of Cadmus, Founder of Thebes, Greece

Cadmus was not a Greek, originally. He was a Phoenician—a prince of Tyre, in the Levant.

His story starts with the abduction of his sister, Europa. She was quite lovely, and Zeus, king of the gods, took a liking to her. Zeus transformed himself into a white bull and walked amongst the herds of Tyre's King Agenor. It just so happened that Europa had been picking flowers nearby. She saw the pure white bull and became enamored with its beauty. She caressed the side of it and then climbed on top of it, all to the dismay of her handmaidens. At that moment, Zeus, in possession of the damsel he most desired, ran down to the sea so quickly that Europa dared not dismount. Then Zeus swam to Crete and transformed back into a human-like form, telling the princess of his true identity. She ended up bearing Zeus many children, because he came back to Crete many times to visit her. The king of gods gave her many gifts, including a necklace fashioned by Hephaestus, the god of fire and metallurgy. The other gifts included, for her protection, Laelaps, a dog which never failed to find its prey, Talos, a mechanical winged man which flew around Crete three times a day to keep watch, and a magical javelin which never missed its mark.

So deeply did Zeus love Europa that he took the image of the bull with which he had first seduced the princess and turned it into the constellation of Taurus, the bull.

Back in Tyre, the king and queen sent their son, Cadmus to go find his sister and to return her safely home.

After long months of searching, Cadmus finally consulted the Oracle at Delphi. The seers told him that Europa was safe and quite happy with Zeus. So, he should give up his search. But they recommended that Cadmus take up another quest in order to fulfill his destiny as founder of Thebes.

The Oracle told him to find a black and white cow and to follow the creature until it came to rest. There, they should build their new city.

So, Cadmus left Delphi with his men and searched nearby for a black and white cow. After a couple of days, they found one, just as described by the Oracle. For two more days, they followed the bovine creature until it came

to rest near a river. There, they slaughtered the cow as a sacrifice to the gods and in preparation for consecrating the ground where they would build their city.

To complete their sacrifice, Cadmus sent half of his men to get water from the river. But after nearly an hour, his men did not return. The prince then sent the other half of his men to find out what had happened. When they did not return, Cadmus went himself to investigate.

At the edge of an open field, next to the river, Cadmus spotted a golden dragon sitting on the ground. In the field before it were the dead bodies of all his men. Some had been gruesomely hacked to death.

Outraged, Cadmus attacked the dragon with his sword and knocked out some of its teeth. The dragon shuddered and smoke poured out from its snout. Suddenly, several warriors appeared and began fighting amongst themselves. They hacked at each other with their swords, and finally only a handful were left, too tired to fight any more.

Cadmus was able to communicate with them enough to convince them to join in his building of the new city. As they spoke, the dragon silently lifted into the sky and flew away.

The Illiad

Ancient Greek past is divided into several periods. The first is that of myth and legend. The second is the Archaic period from whence the first Greek writing of any note comes to us. The two most famous writings of this period have been attributed to a man named Homer. We know little about him. In fact, it's quite possible that the writing was actually done by more than one person and the works collected by others. The Iliad tells the story of the ten-year war of the Greek city states against Troy (Ilion). The Odyssey tells the story of the ten-year voyage home of King Odysseus and his men. These writings tell of two events which occurred during the period of myth and legend.

For many years, scientists felt that the story of Troy was nothing more than myth—a story made up by Homer. Ironically even today, scientists are quick to dismiss ideas that lay outside of their teachings and experience. They use logical fallacies to put such notions away, effectively refusing to

investigate. So, it took amateur investigators to unravel the mystery, because the professionals “knew better” than to try.

A Scottish journalist named Charles Maclaren claimed, in 1822, to have identified the true location of Troy at a large hill named Hisarlik in western Turkey. Forty-four years later, Frank Calvert, whose family owned half of the hill, made detailed inspections of the land. Heinrich Schliemann visited Frank Calvert in 1868 and was so impressed by what Calvert had done that he financed a more extensive dig. Regrettably, Schliemann took credit for the finds. And professional archaeologists later condemned Schliemann’s amateurish damage to the site.

So, it seems that the myth of the Trojan War may have been, in part, based on fact.

According to myth, the roots of the tragic war can be found in the lust of both Zeus and Poseidon for Thetis, a sea nymph and goddess of water. When Zeus learned that the son born of Thetis would be greater than his father, Zeus was concerned that his desired sexual exploits with Thetis would result in his own dethroning. The king of gods then warned his brother of the same prophecy and the two of them made a pact to avoid sex with Thetis, lest it lead to their undoing. Instead, they plotted to have Thetis marry a mortal. They chose Peleus.

But Peleus asked and Thetis refused. Proteus, one of the ancient sea gods, told Peleus that he needed to catch Thetis while she was sleeping. He should bind her so she could not change shape into a serpent, raging lioness, water or flame. Thus, Thetis was forced to agree to their marriage. It’s interesting to note that kidnapping was considered okay to the Greeks, but breaking a promise was considered dishonorable.

Zeus wanted their marriage to be an event no one would soon forget. He picked a garden near Chiron’s cave on Mount Pelion. All of the gods, goddesses and demigods were invited, yet one goddess was expressly forbidden to attend. That was Eris, goddess of discord. And no one would ever want a troublemaker at a party, especially a wedding party.

Eris was not pleased at being left out. She took one of the golden apples of Hesperides, inscribed on it, “To the most beautiful,” and tossed it over the

garden wall.

But who would claim to be the recipient of the Golden Apple? Who would be vain enough to think that she was the most beautiful female mentioned in the inscription. Eris had lived up to her name, creating discord despite having not been invited.

Hera, Aphrodite and Athena each claimed the Golden Apple. To settle this dispute, they called upon Zeus to judge who among them was the most fair. But the king of gods was too wise to get involved in this no-win scenario. He knew that the two losers would end up hating him for a very long time. So, Zeus chose the wise and fair judge, Prince Paris of Troy.

After the wedding party, the three goddesses bathed in a spring near Mount Ida, not far from Troy, and then presented themselves to the prince while he tended to his flock of sheep.

Paris found it impossible to choose and begged their forgiveness.

Desperate to win, each goddess in turn, stripped off her clothes, stood naked before the young prince, and attempted to bribe him. Hera told Paris that she would make him king of all Europe and Asia. Athena offered to give him superior skill and wisdom in war. And Aphrodite offered to Paris the love of the most beautiful woman in the world.

“But how?” asked Paris. “The most beautiful woman is Helen, wife of Menelaus.”

“Am I not the goddess of love?”

Paris gave the Golden Apple to Aphrodite and thus set upon the path to war and to his own city’s destruction.

Helen’s father had been so worried that his daughter’s great beauty would cause war to break out amongst the Greek city states and amongst the dozens of suitors from those royal houses. He obtained an oath from each of the suitors that they would defend the honor of Helen’s marriage after her father had made his choice.

When Paris later visited Sparta, Helen immediately fell in love with him and left her husband willingly. Menelaus was outraged that the Trojan prince would insult Sparta by stealing its queen. King Menelaus contacted

his brother, King Agamemnon and then the others who had sworn to protect Helen's marriage to Menelaus. He encouraged them to honor their oaths. And thus began the Greek war against Troy.

Homer's Iliad covers only a few weeks of the ten-year conflict, but it mentions in passing many of the back story elements.

After many deaths on both sides, the Greeks suddenly disappeared from the battlefield. In their place, before the great gates of Troy, a giant, wooden horse stood.

The Trojan people were overjoyed that they had defeated the Greeks and then they wheeled into their city the tribute left behind.

After their celebration had wound down and the people had gone to bed, tired and happy, Greek soldiers opened a secret hatch on the bottom of the wooden horse. They crept to the city gates and flung them open to the waiting Greek army.

In one night of Greek cleverness, Troy had lost the war. Today, the term "Trojan horse" refers to a sneak attack hidden inside something more pleasant.

The Odyssey

The thousands of Greeks warriors who remained after the fall of Troy, each took their own ships and returned home. But during their voyage home, King Odysseus and his men were blown off course by a storm.

Homer's Odyssey tells of the ten-year struggle of Odysseus and his men to return home to Ithaca—an island at what was then the far western edge of Greek territory.

When Menelaus sent word to all the former suitors of Helen, Odysseus pretended to be crazy. He attempted to plow his own field using both a donkey and an ox yoked together. This proved to be highly inefficient, because the two animals have entirely different strides. And Odysseus threw salt into the furrows instead of seed. He had received a prediction that, if he went, he would be delayed for many years in his return home. Naturally, Odysseus did not want to leave his wife, Penelope and their newborn son, Telemachus.

Agamemnon, brother to Menelaus, sent Palamedes to verify or disprove the king's madness. Agamemnon's envoy borrowed Penelope's child and placed it before the plow and that stopped Odysseus, showing that he was indeed, quite sane.

The war lasted ten years. And, as Odysseus had feared, the journey home lasted another ten. When he finally returned to his family, Telemachus was a young man of twenty.

But many of the other Greek kings were thankful that Odysseus was with them, because of his wise counsel and his brilliant idea for the great wooden horse.

On his journey home, all twelve of his ships find their way out of a storm and into the land of the lotus eaters—drug addicts who enticed the king and his men to eat their delicious lotus plant. The narcotic effect made them lose any interest in returning home. Through sheer strength of will, Odysseus was able to force his men back to their ships and they manned the oars to put some distance between them and the seductive lotus plants. Scholars place this land just off the coast of Tunisia, on Djerba Island, or in coastal Libya.

From there, Odysseus and his twelve ships sailed north, past Sicily and into the Tyrrhenian Sea. In dire need of provisions, they pulled up to a small island and went ashore. In a nearby cave, they found a large supply of provisions and thought themselves to be lucky. Moments later, a giant Cyclops came into the cave, herding a flock of sheep, and rolled a large stone into place, blocking the exit.

“Hello,” said Odysseus. “Please forgive our intrusion, but we are your guests—weary travelers from afar. As is the custom, we ask that you share your food with us.”

“I, Polyphemus, do not believe in such customs.” The Cyclops promptly picked up one of the Greek warriors and took a bite out of him. In two more bites, the man was gone. Then, the giant ate one more. In the dim light of the cave's one fire, the giant could see the remainder of the warriors cowering against the wall.

“I will save all of you for later,” said the Cyclops.

The following morning, the Cyclops ate two more warriors. Before Polyphemus could take his sheep out to pasture, Odysseus struck up a conversation with the one-eyed giant.

After they had talked for a few minutes, the giant asked, “What is your name? Please tell me. If you do, I’ll give you a guest prize to make it worth your while.”

Odysseus thought carefully for a moment, guided by the quiet whispers of Athena, goddess of wisdom. “My name is Nobody. And what is this prize of which you spoke?”

“Well, Nobody, I will save you for last. You will have a few more days of life than your comrades.”

“Thank you, Polyphemus. I noticed that you have some wine. Perhaps that would help stave off the heartburn. We Greeks can be hard to digest.”

“Hmm-mm. Good idea, Nobody. A little wine would be delightful about now.”

Polyphemus picked up the barrel, removed the stopper and drank deeply, gulping down the intoxicating liquor.

Odysseus continued his conversation, encouraging the Cyclops to drink more so as to enjoy his lunch that much more. Before long, Polyphemus was so drunk, he fell asleep.

“Quickly,” said Odysseus. “Help me sharpen this pole.”

The Greeks whittled the end of a long, wooden pole so that it now had a strong, sharp point. They hardened it in the fire and then thrust the point into the giant’s sleeping eye.

Polyphemus shrieked in pain and scrambled around the cave, attempting to find any of the Greeks, but they were able to stay just out of reach. The giant bellowed and shouted, then picked up things at random and threw them, hoping to hit one or more of the men. But nothing he did gave him satisfaction.

Odysseus taunted him that his sheep would now go hungry, because Polyphemus could not see to take his flock out to pasture.

Taking this as a dare, Polyphemus carefully opened the cave entrance, and called to his sheep, feeling of their coats to make certain that none of the Greeks were trying to escape. Then he rolled the great stone back into place to keep the Greeks inside.

Because the Cyclops could not see, he did not notice that each man had hidden underneath a sheep, clutching to its fleece to make their escape. Outside, they simply rolled away from the sheep and quietly made their way back toward their ships.

Outside, Polyphemus encountered one of his fellow Cyclops.

“Polyphemus, what happened to your eye?”

“Nobody did this to me.”

“But how did it happen?”

“Are you deaf? I told you that Nobody did this to me.”

“Yes, I heard you. It’s okay if you don’t want to talk about it.” In the distance, the Greek warriors were boarding their ships. “Oh, my! So many men! If only we were closer, we could feast on human flesh. But they’re getting away.”

“What? More men? I have some in my cave. Unless—”

Polyphemus stumbled toward his friend’s voice. “Please, point to them for me.”

Immediately, the Cyclops ran in the direction of the Greek ships which were now pulling up anchor.

“Nobody!” Polyphemus called out. “Is that you? How did you escape?”

Odysseus felt suddenly impulsive. Athena had been helping the king most of his life, but now she felt a pang of disappointment that she could not prevent the king’s next action. Because of his rage over the loss of his men, and because of his own ego, the king of Ithaca yelled back to the wounded Cyclops, “I fooled you, you arrogant, foul creature. Know this: that I, Odysseus of Ithaca did spoil your eye for the murder of my men. May you spend the remainder of your days in despair.”

At the sound of the king's voice, Polyphemus could tell the direction and distance. He fell to his knees, scrambling around the ground until he found a boulder. With fierce strength, he plucked it from the ground and threw it in the direction of the king's ship, but his blind aim missed the ship altogether.

As the ships made their way from the island, Polyphemus cried out to his father, Poseidon. "Father, I have been wounded by Odysseus, king of Ithaca. Avenge me for I have been blinded."

If only Odysseus had remained "Nobody" in the mind of Polyphemus, Poseidon may never have known who had injured his son. Poseidon made certain that the king would be delayed in his return home and that he would lose all his men.

The lost Greeks found their way to the island of Aeolus, god of the winds. There, the king's ship was outfitted with a bag of winds which would blow their ships back to Ithaca. But Poseidon whispered into the ear of one of the king's men that the bag contained gold. In a fit of momentary greed, the man opened the bag just as they came within sight of home. The resulting storm blew them all the way back to the home of Aeolus. Outraged at their return, Aeolus refused to help them any more.

From there, the Greek ships make landfall on southern Corsica, in the realm of the Laestrygonians who also like eating men. After their escape, they encounter Circe, the witch, on the western coast of the Italian peninsula. She was the perfect hostess until her spell turned half of his men into pigs. Hermes, the messenger god intervened and gave Odysseus a potion which made him temporarily immune to Circe's magic. Thus, the Ithacan king was able to force Circe to restore his men. She did so, but Circe admitted that she loved Odysseus and wanted very much for him to stay with her. His men stay with Circe for a year, with Odysseus taking part of that time to visit the underworld, whereupon he learns of many events, including the murder of his friend, King Agamemnon, and his wife's troubles with suitors.

Finally, the king of Ithaca is convinced by his men to return home. Circe tells Odysseus about some of the dangers which remain on his voyage and how to survive them.

While passing the land of the Sirens, Odysseus has his men plug their ears with bees wax so they will not steer their ships toward the rocks. But Odysseus has his men tie him to the mast of his own ship so he can witness the magical song of the Sirens and live to tell about it.

Then, the Greek ships navigate the narrow strait between Sicily and Italy—between the six-headed monster, Scylla, and the deadly whirlpool, Charybdis. Despite their care, the Scylla is able to grab one of their oars and pulls the ship close enough to snatch up six men.

Next, Odysseus and his remaining ships land on the island of Thrinacia to replenish their depleted provisions. Some of his men ignored the warnings of Circe and took some of the cattle there belonging to the sun god, Helios.

Outraged, Helios demanded that Zeus punish the Greek warriors for their theft. “If you don’t,” said Helios, “I’ll make the sun shine in the underworld, instead of the land of the living.”

Zeus didn’t like the idea of living in darkness, or moving to the underworld, so he used his lightning to stir up a storm, crashing all of the Greek ships, killing all but Odysseus.

Weak, battered and hungry, Odysseus washed up on the shore of Ogygia Island, where he remained a prisoner and lover of Calypso for seven years. He might well have stayed there for the rest of his life had it not been for the help of Hermes, demanding that she release Odysseus from her spell.

Odysseus took a small boat and again became shipwrecked on the island of the Phaeacians (modern Corfu). There, he tells his story and they agree to help him get home secretly so as not to alert the suitors threatening his wife.

On his way home, he encounters his son Telemachus and has him promise to keep his identity a secret until they have killed all the suitors who have abused his wife and son.

Disguised as a wandering beggar, the king wandered into his own palace and was quickly abused by the suitors. Penelope did not recognize her husband in his clever disguise—a camouflage devised by Athena. She told all who were nearby that she will marry the one who can string her husband’s bow and shoot an arrow through the shafts of twelve axes.

One by one, each suitor took up the bow—a gift to Odysseus from the god, Apollo—but each failed to string the bow. Finally, Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, strung the bow and let loose an arrow with such force that it easily sliced through all twelve axe shafts. Then, before the surprise could clear from the suitors' minds, the king let loose the rest of his arrows, killing many of the suitors where they sat, while his son and servant bolted the doors. When the slaughter was complete, Odysseus and his son returned to Penelope.

“How do I know you're not some apparition from the gods?” she asked.

“Test me, my love.”

“All right, then. Move our bed to the other side of our bedroom.”

Odysseus let out a tired laugh and then reminded his wife, “But my darling, one of the bedposts is a tree rooted to the ground itself, just as I had built it so many years ago.”

Deeper Meaning?

Homer's Iliad tells of a war over a queen's infidelity. But the Greeks were always concerned about honor and how their actions would appear, not only to their fellow Greeks, but to posterity. Could the Trojan War have been more about their own selfishness? Troy stood at the entrance to the Black Sea. It controlled that traffic. What if the Greeks were jealous of that control? What if they wanted to eliminate Troy in order to conquer the Black Sea for themselves?

The story of Helen's escape to Troy may or may not have been true. But even if it were true, it could have been orchestrated by Menelaus and the other Greeks in order to eliminate their competition in Troy. Such is the hypothesis of Rod Martin, Jr. concerning this ancient Greek tale. Lying to achieve an honorable goal was considered also honorable. So, the Greeks could have lied about their reason for going to war against Troy. They deeply respected cleverness and cunning.

Chapter 3 — Myths of Wonder

One of the earliest myths that seems to be almost entirely about humans and not the gods, directly, concerns the founding of Athens. The only wrinkle in the story is that the main character—Cecrops—was half man, half snake.

Cecrops and his men had been looking long and hard for a place to call home. When they found the hill in Attica, Greece, they prayed that this would be it. The primitives who dwelled here seemed friendly enough.

Cecrops called out to his men, “If this be our home, what shall we call it? What name should we give to this city we are about to build?”

Amongst his men, there were two suggestions. One was to name the city after Poseidon, god of the sea. The other was to name the city after Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom.

“These suggestions are equally wonderful. Both Athena and Poseidon have bestowed great blessings upon this world. To help us decide which name will be placed on this city, please tell us which god has offered the greatest benefit to humanity?”

“Poseidon,” called out one of the men, “god of the sea. He has given us salt from the sea—a most essential preservative.”

All of the men laughed. While the benefit of salt was widely known, this seemed hardly a benefit directly from Poseidon. Salt could be found from other sources.

“Poseidon, god of horses. Our world would be far poorer without these beautiful beasts.”

All of the men voiced their approval.

“Very good,” said Cecrops. “And Athena?”

“Sir,” said one of the men. “There are so many things that Athena has done for us. Wisdom, amongst them. She is also patroness of weaving, ship building, furniture...”

“And the olive,” said another.

“Yes, the olive. Without her, we would never have discovered it for food, oil to light our lamps and for cooking. A most indispensable gift.”

“So,” said Cecrops, “we have horses from Poseidon and the olive from Athena. Let us put these to a vote. All in favor of horses from Poseidon?” He counted the hands raised. “And all in favor of the olive from Athena?”

Again, Cecrops counted and found the great majority of his men felt that the olive was a far more important gift, so they would name their new city after Athena. And today, the city of Athens, Greece has a temple to the goddess on its most prominent hill.

Cecrops and Dragons

If Cecrops had merely been a commander or general, the story would have been far more believable. While it’s true that the men were paying tribute to two gods—Poseidon and Pallas Athena—everything else about the story was quite ordinary.

One researcher has a possible explanation for what may be the truth behind this story. Rod Martin, Jr. has written extensively on the topic of ancient myth and has even written a couple of novels that explore the possible reality behind the myths and legends of old. The second novel in his “Edge of Remembrance” series, *Edge of Remembrance: Tales of Atlantis Lost*, includes an enactment of the Cecrops event.

Modern scholars suspect that centaurs—half horse, half man—were merely the misinterpretation of cavalrymen on horseback. To the ancient primitive who had never seen horses used in any domesticated manner, the sight of a man on horseback would have both startled and confused them.

Similarly, Martin suspects that Cecrops may have been the captain of a dragon airship. When he landed his ship in Attica, the natives were startled to see the hatch atop the ship pop open and the top half of a man appear above it. So, Cecrops may not have been half man, half snake, after all. He may merely have been an ordinary human standing in the hatch of an extraordinary machine from ancient Atlantis.

Ironically, many modern scientists dismiss any thought of Atlantis ever having been real. But their attitude on the subject is anything but scientific. In fact, their attitude stands on a logical fallacy—an argument to ignorance.

The story of Atlantis first came to us from the Greek philosopher, Plato. Martin wrote in one of his non-fiction articles on the Atlantis myth, “we have a great deal of evidence in support of the past existence of Atlantis. Regrettably, many scientists are too afraid to look at the facts. We have three pieces of evidence which tend to prove that an Atlantis-like event occurred right when Plato said the legendary island had disappeared. Each one of these could be a proxy for the Atlantis subsidence.”

Martin also pointed out that dragons are a popular myth, worldwide, even in ancient societies—from Central America, to Greece, and all the way across the world to China. In Egyptian myth, the tale of the dragon and the merchant prince seems to support Martin’s hypothesis. Rescued by a dragon, the merchant prince talked to the dragon many times while he recuperated. Sometimes the dragon would appear as the beast that had rescued him, and sometimes the dragon would appear as a man. Martin suggests that the voice of the dragon was merely that of the captain of the dragon airship. Sometimes the captain would talk to the prince from within the dragon, and sometimes from outside the dragon.

The tale of Cadmus and his dragon can be similarly solved by using Martin’s hypothesis. A dragon airship was down for repairs. When Cadmus knocked out the teeth of the dragon, it fouled up the circuitry in the ship and the men had to step outside to get air. But their captain may not have wanted them to reveal themselves to the intruder. So, they fought amongst themselves. When the men were done fighting, the pilot had finished the repairs and simply flew the ship away, afraid that Cadmus might commandeer the ship.

If such a hypothesis were true, then what of the gods and goddesses? What were they? What was the truth behind their stories?

In the next section of the book, we’ll take a brief look at some of those stories.

Part 2 — Greek Religion

Chapter 4 — The Burdens of Selfishness and Hubris

In the Ancient Greek religion, the universe was originally ruled by Chaos (emptiness). Like so many other primitive religions, Chaos needed to be tamed and the early gods established a foundation from which all of creation could persist.

Gaia (mother Earth) sprang into existence from Chaos. She gave birth to Uranus (heaven) and Pontus (ocean).

In the Greek religion, even the gods felt vulnerable. They were constantly battling against various kinds of chaos or turmoil. One of the recurring themes involved fathers who feared or loathed their children.

Gaia took her son, Uranus, as her lover and gave birth to a host of additional gods, who later became known as the Titans. After the Titans, Gaia gave birth to the Cyclopes (3 one-eyed giants) and Hecatonchires (3 hundred-handed giants). Uranus despised these six youngest children and locked them up in Tartarus (underworld), much to Gaia's dismay.

Cronus volunteered to help his mother get her youngest children out of prison. She gave him a massive sickle with which to castrate his father. Cronus ambushed his father and crippled him. But Cronus also despised his younger brothers and ran them back into Tartarus at his first opportunity. Gaia felt betrayed.

Cronus took his sister, Rhea, as his wife and she gave him many children. But Cronus, fearful that his own children would do to him what he had done to his own father, he swallowed each of them whole. When Rhea had Zeus, she put a boulder in the infant's swaddling clothes and presented this to her husband. He didn't take the time to look and merely gulped it down.

Rhea had her only remaining son raised away from court so that Cronus would not discover the trickery.

When Zeus had come of age, he wanted revenge for the deaths of his older siblings. His wife, Metis, was the wisest of the gods and she suggested that Zeus become the cupbearer to Cronus. Into his drink, Zeus should put a powerful herb which would cause Cronus to vomit up the children he had swallowed so many years before. And it worked. After getting his brothers and sisters back, Zeus set free the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires so that the younger gods would have a fighting chance against the older Titans.

The Cyclopes were so thankful at being set free, they fashioned a lightning bolt for Zeus, a helmet of invisibility for Hades, and a massive trident for Poseidon.

After ten years of fighting, the younger gods conquered Cronus and his old guard, and placed the lot of them in Tartarus—the underworld prison.

After settling into their new roles as masters of the universe, these younger gods, now ruling from Mount Olympus, divided up their areas of responsibilities. Zeus would be their king and hold dominion over the skies. Poseidon would take the seas, and Hades would rule over the underworld.

But one day, Zeus was told of a prophecy, that his children by Metis would overthrow him as king of the gods. Fearing for his own personal chaos, the new king of gods did the only selfish thing he could do. He swallowed Metis whole, despite the fact that she was already pregnant.

Zeus would have six other wives, many concubines and lovers, and dozens of children. A man's wife was supposed to do his bidding and to remain faithful, but Zeus did as he pleased.

Thus, when bad things happened to good people, the Greeks could blame their bad fortune on conflicts between the gods. An insult would not go unnoticed and the damaged pride of one god or goddess would not go unpunished. Or a mortal child fathered by Zeus, or their mother, would be tortured and hounded by Hera, Zeus's seventh and most jealous wife.

So, the Greek gods and goddesses had very human frailties and the world suffered because of them.

Chapter 5 — The Ages of Man

The earliest age of man was called the Golden Age. This was during the time of Cronus. His rule brought great prosperity to the world and the gods lived amongst the humans.

The Silver Age came during the rule of Zeus. When the humans refused to worship Zeus, he destroyed them. The few humans who were sturdy enough to survive were warriors. Because these men were destructive, Zeus decided to destroy them, as well. And thus, the Bronze Age of man came to an end, because Zeus sent a great flood to rid the world of them.

Two people survived that great flood. They were named Deucalion and Pyrrah. On the command of Zeus to repopulate the world, these two turned stones into humans. The hardness of the stones thus came to represent the hardness of their lives in the new Heroic Age. To Zeus's delight, the men of this age held great honor and humble worship of the gods.

But like all artifacts of the physical world, the Heroic Age died out and Zeus created yet another group of humans. This was the Iron Age, the most brutal age of them all.

Chapter 6 — Morals of the Gods

The Greek gods did not have the highest of morals—not by modern standards. In this, the Greek religion offered its adherents a bitter taste of reality. Being good, honorable or even clever did not guarantee a positive outcome.

Zeus had all his ladies. And in the wake of his infidelity, a great deal of suffering was born.

Zeus Giving Birth to a New Kind of Chaos

The king of gods was a vindictive jerk. If someone fell onto Zeus's bad side, the unlucky man or woman might end up being tortured forever. There was no leniency or mercy. There was no nurturing spirit to improve the attitudes of those in his charge. For the slightest infraction, Zeus wanted revenge. And when Zeus did what he felt like doing, people—and even some of the gods—got hurt because of it.

Sisyphus earned the wrath of Zeus by too much scheming to kill his own brother, Salmoneus. The wayward mortal had consulted an oracle to see how he could best be rid of his brother. The seer told him to marry his niece, Tyro, and that her children would then kill their uncle and grandfather. When Tyro found out what her husband's plans had been all along, she murdered her own son and married Cretheus, king of Iolcos. But then she fell in love with Enipeus, a river god, who spurned her advances. When Poseidon took a liking to her, he disguised himself as Enipeus and slept with her. She bore him two children—Pelias (the half brother Aeson, evil uncle of Jason), and Neleus (future king of Pylos). Sisyphus earned a place in Tantalus where he had to roll a large boulder up a hill. But every time he accomplished the deed, the boulder would roll back down. So, he was doomed for eternity to perform a task that would immediately be undone.

Tantalus had been given the rare privilege to be invited to dine at Olympus, amongst the gods. To impress the gods, Tantalus offered up his own son as

a sacrifice. He cut up the young boy and made a stew out of the bits and pieces. Instead of admiration for his sacrifice, the gods were disgusted. Instead, they restored the boy to life and Zeus condemned Tantalus to Tartarus. His special place was to have his feet stuck in one place with a fruit tree above him and a pool of water below. Whenever he reached up in hunger to pluck the fruit, the branches would pull back, just out of reach. Whenever he kneeled to satisfy his thirst, the water would recede from his lips. From his name, we have the English word “tantalize”—perpetual temptation without any satisfaction.

Prometheus ran afoul of Zeus for daring to give fire to the mortals of Earth. For the kindness of Prometheus, he was rewarded by being chained to a mountain. Every day, a giant eagle would come to eat his liver. Because Prometheus was a Titan, he was immortal. At night, he would heal, and the next day, the painful process would start all over again. His fate would have been perpetual torment, had it not been for the cleverness and heroism of Herakles. With his massive strength, he killed the giant eagle and broke the chains which bound the Titan.

Part 3 — Greek Monsters

Chapter 7 — Typhon and Echidna

Gaia had taken many lovers after her son, Cronus, castrated her son and husband Uranus. When she took her brother, Tartarus, as lover, their one child was Typhon, the deadliest monster of all time.

Typhon took Echidna as his wife. She was half woman, half snake, and she bore him many monstrous children.

Despite the wrongs committed by her children, Gaia felt heartbroken that her grandchildren had locked the Titans in Tartarus. She spoke to Typhon and asked that he battle with Zeus and then to set the Titans free. And Typhon agreed.

With a form consisting of a massive trunk from which sprang a hundred snake heads, even the gods of Olympus trembled and fled. From every mouth, nostril and eye, giant flames would flash out at Typhon's enemies. And the monster's bellowing screams were akin to dozens of volcanoes erupting all at once.

Battle hardened after having spent ten years defeating the Titans, Zeus was no pushover. With his first volley of lightning, he seared off all of Typhon's ugly heads. The monster fell over in shock at the sudden loss. Zeus jumped on the beast and beat him again and again and again. When Typhon had been pummeled nearly to death, Zeus dragged the creature's hideous carcass into Tartarus (Typhon's father) and locked him away forever.

Echidna and her children quivered in fear that the same might happen to them.

Chapter 8 — Perseus and Cetus

King Acrisius of Argos wanted a son, but the Oracle at Delphi told him that he would never have one. Instead, they told him that his own grandson, by his daughter Danaë, would ultimately lead to the king's death.

Terrified, the king locked up his daughter so that no man would ever touch her. But Zeus, king of the gods, had taken a liking to her and descended into her prison as a shower of golden rain. When she gave birth to a baby boy, named Perseus, Acrisius locked them both in a box and threw the box into the sea. Days later, mother and son landed on Serifos Island and were befriended by a fisherman named Dictys, brother to the island's king.

When Perseus came of age, the king of Serifos, Polydectes, tricked the young demigod into a deadly quest—to bring back the head of Medusa. One look at the vile creature's face would turn a man to stone.

Being a beloved son of Zeus, Perseus had help from many of the gods and goddesses—winged sandals from Hermes, a polished shield from Athena, a helmet of invisibility from Hades, and an unbreakable sword from his father, Zeus.

With these divine gifts, Perseus was able to cut off Medusa's head without himself being turned to stone. He even had a special sack in which to store the hideous head.

On his way home, Perseus encountered a major distraction. King Cepheus of Ethiopia had chained his own daughter, Andromeda, to a rock so that she could be sacrificed to Poseidon's pet monster, Cetus.

One look at Andromeda and Perseus was smitten with her beauty. In order to save the fair princess, he climbed to the top of the rock and waited. When Cetus emerged from the sea to devour the young woman, Perseus closed his eyes and withdrew Medusa's head from his bag. Immediately, Cetus turned to stone and Andromeda was saved.

Before returning to Serifos, Perseus stopped in Argos to visit his evil grandfather. When Perseus told the old man who he was and what he had

done, the king called him a liar. “How dare you lie to your king. You could not have obtained Medusa’s head. That’s impossible.”

The young hero shook his head in disgust and opened the sack one last time, fulfilling the oracle’s prophecy.

Chapter 9 — Herakles and His Labors

Zeus was a serial adulterer. Not only had he had six wives before his sister, Hera, but he had dozens of other lovers—both divine and mortal. One of the mortal mistresses was Alcmene, wife of Theban General Amphitryon. Zeus presented himself to Alcmene in the form of her husband, and made her pregnant with a son. That same evening, Amphitryon returned from war and made love to his wife, making her pregnant with another son.

Zeus's wife, Hera, despised the children of her husband's infidelity. When she heard that another demigod son would be born, Hera coerced her husband to agree that a descendent of Perseus would become high king of all the land. Two ancestors of Perseus were about to be born. She knew that Eurystheus was soon to be born, and, wanting to cheat Herakles (born Alcides) of the position as high king, she went to speed up the birth of Eurystheus. She also commanded Ilithyia, goddess of childbirth, to cross her legs, thus slowing down the delivery of Alcmene's two boys—twins from two fathers.

Alcmene's servant girl lied to Ilithyia. "My lady has already delivered her two boys."

In great relief, Ilithyia relaxed and thus allowed the birth to proceed as normal.

The general's wife, however, knew what was going on. She feared that Hera would harm her family if she found out that the young demigod had been born. To save the rest of her family, she left the young demigod out in the open to die of exposure.

Goddess Athena took pity on her half-brother and took him up to Olympus. When she arrived at the home of the gods, Hera did not recognize the young infant. She took pity on him and suckled him. But the young demigod was so strong in his sucking that he tortured the queen goddess. In agony, she ripped the infant from her breast and the milk which had been gushing out sprayed across the heavens, creating the Milky Way.

Because the infant had tasted divine milk, he developed super powers of great strength.

Athena recognized that any further aid on Olympus was likely not possible, so she returned the infant to his mortal parents. There, they raised both the demigod, Alcides, and his mortal, twin brother Iphicles.

Later, in an attempt to quiet Hera's rage, the young son of Zeus was renamed Herakles in the queen goddess's honor.

Hera was so outraged by this flawed attempt to quell her anger, that she sent two vipers into the children's room. Iphicles, of course, was terrified. Herakles grabbed a snake in each hand and squeezed the life out of them. Later, a servant found the young demigod playing with the dead snakes as if they were toys.

When Herakles came of age, he married Megara of Thebes, King Creon's daughter. The young couple soon had two beautiful children.

The young man's happiness was like a thorn in Hera's eye. She put a spell on the young man so that he murdered his own children.

After Herakles had been cured of his temporary madness, he sought advice from the Oracle at Delphi, not realizing that the seer was guided by Hera—his nemesis.

The Oracle told Herakles that he could regain his honor by going to his distant cousin, High King Eurystheus and serving him for ten years. Herakles was to do anything that the king required of him. Ironically, Herakles would have been the High King, but Hera had cheated him of that.

Eurystheus gave his archenemy ten impossible tasks, but once they were done, the king found reason to dismiss two of the accomplishments on technicalities that had not been specified in advance. On a whim, he gave Herakles two more chores, making it twelve labors in all. The labors were,

1. Kill the Nemean Lion.
2. Kill the Lernaean Hydra with its 9 heads.
3. Retrieve the Golden Hind of goddess Artemis.
4. Imprison the Erymanthian Boar.

5. Cleanse the Augean stables all within one twenty-four hour period.
6. Kill the Stymphalian Birds.
7. Imprison the Cretan Bull.
8. Take the Mares of Diomedes.
9. Steal the girdle of Hippolyta, the Amazon queen.
10. Round up the cattle of Geryon the monster.
11. Take the golden apples of the Hesperides.
12. Enslave the Cerberus and return to Eurystheus with it.

After these labors, Herakles went on to have many other adventures, including joining Jason and his Argonauts in their quest to steal the Golden Fleece.

Part 4 — Greek Connection to Civilization

Chapter 10 — Knowledge, Wisdom and Philosophy

Jared Diamond, in his best-selling book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, posed a profound question and then attempted to answer that question: Why do some societies remain primitive while others become far more advanced?

Needless to say, his answer involved guns, germs and steel, but it also involved the passive lay of the land in our world. Cross-pollenization of ideas is far easier with societies connected in the same temperature zone. On a map of the Earth, these would be societies that are horizontally connected (East-West), rather than vertically connected (North-South). The Chinese shared with the West their technologies of paper, printing and gunpowder.

As we mentioned earlier, the Greeks were blessed with lots of land mixed with lots of water— islands and a great deal of coastline, making them an ideal culture of traders and travelers.

The Greeks were experimenters not only with science, art and culture, but also with government and philosophy. This melting pot of wisdom came to a fine boil during the time of Socrates and carried on by one of his students, Plato, and by one of Plato's students, Aristotle. Arguably, these three men did far more in creating the foundation of Western civilization than any other group.

From the Greeks, we learned the blessings and pitfalls of democracy. From the Greeks, we learned that the world was round and that the axis of its rotation was itself rotating around a larger cycle called precession— changing the pole star over time.

But within Greek myth, we may find an answer far deeper and more profound than in Jared Diamond's great work.

We know that those who have knowledge have a prejudicial advantage over those who remain in ignorance.

Researcher and philosopher, Rod Martin, Jr. once pointed out that this advantage cannot be gained by the lazy or the biased. Such an advantage only comes from those who either inherit the knowledge or wrest it from the universe-at-large. Take, for instance, the accomplishments of Chuck Yeager, of Tenzing and Hillary, and of Roger Bannister. Yeager broke the sound barrier on October 14, 1947. Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary successfully climbed to the summit of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953. And Roger Bannister became the first to break the four minute mile on May 6, 1954. Each of these accomplishments were a first. Until they had been accomplished, others had struggled to meet the challenge and had failed. After their accomplishments, many others met and exceeded those accomplishments. It was as if the knowledge that it could be done had opened a floodgate of copycats.

The same effect, according to Martin, applies to the creation of civilization. Certainly, someone could create civilization without any prior knowledge that such was possible. But it would have taken extraordinary courage and ability. This is why those who come first in any endeavor are remembered throughout history.

But what if there were a people who already knew that civilization was possible? What if they already knew what civilization was like? We will explore this idea in the final chapter.

Chapter 11 — Foundations of Greek Thought

While we have the forward-looking wisdom of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to thank for much of the foundation for Western culture, we need only look two centuries earlier, to the life of Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, to find evidence of a far deeper heritage from Greece.

In the late 7th century BC, Athens was suffering from corruption and tyranny. The people of Athens were so desperate for change, they took one of their wisest individuals and gave him the job of establishing a fair set of laws to govern them all. Solon did that and then took a long vacation so he could not be coerced into changing his mind on any of the more unpopular elements.

While Solon was abroad, he stopped by the capital of Egypt (at the time, Saïs), and happened to strike up a conversation with one of the priests, there. Within that conversation, he learned that his own people had a culture that was far older than even he had imagined. But his fellow Greeks had forgotten their heritage. Too many disasters had destroyed their memories.

The unnamed priest told him, “Oh Solon, Solon, you Greeks are all children, and there’s no such thing as an old Greek.... You are all young in mind, you have no belief rooted in old tradition and no knowledge hoary with age. And the reason is this. There have been and will be many different calamities to destroy mankind, the greatest of them by fire and water...” (translation of Plato’s *Timaeus* by Sir Desmond Lee, 1965).

The priest then went on to tell Solon of Atlantis—a once great nation that had become greedy. The prehistoric Greeks and the Egyptians had fought against the invaders from Atlantis and had won. Then, Atlantis had been swallowed in a night and a day—all about 9,000 years before Solon’s time, or about 9,600 BC.

Rod Martin, Jr. discovered in the scientific literature three pieces of evidence which prove a world-changing event occurred 9620 BC—right when Plato’s Atlantis was swallowed whole by the sea. This was the date

that the Younger Dryas suddenly ended, issuing in our Holocene warm interglacial, with a temperature rise of +7°C in 30 years. Suddenly, civilization worldwide was possible, all because Atlantis had died. That same year, volcanic debris left its mark in Greenland (9620.77 BC). And just as the Younger Dryas ended, sea level worldwide fell by about 2 meters. That was the amount that Atlantis had displaced in the world's oceans before it sank.

Martin also compared the myth of Athena's birth with the destruction of Atlantis. The similarities are striking.

While Metis was the wisest individual of all time, Atlantis was the most advanced civilization of all time (at least until the time of Plato). Though Plato did not mention the refugees of Atlantis, he did mention the colonies of Atlantis. While Athena was born full-grown, clothed and armored from her father's head, the refugees, no doubt, carried with them their mature society from the head (capital) city of Atlantis. And while Athena gave the world many of the skills needed to reestablish civilization (weaving, building ships, making furniture and discovering the olive), the refugees of Atlantis may have done these same things.

These children of Atlantis may have given us many of the myths of Eurasia—from the dragons and monsters, to the gods and goddesses.

And perhaps the greatest gift from those refugee children was their knowledge that civilization was possible. Certainly, Jared Diamond's passive geography played its part in spreading the details of civilization, but Martin's "active ingredient"—prior knowledge—had a far more important part in helping us restart civilization on this wonderful, life-bearing world we call Earth.

Conclusion

Thank you so much for reading this book.

I hope this work has helped to give you a deeper understanding of Greek myth—its heroes, monsters, gods and goddesses. Also, I hope you have come away with an appreciation for what may lie beyond the edge of what is known.

If you merely wanted to dip your toe in the subject and to learn a little about it, then you're done. But if you want a far deeper understanding of our past and how the Greeks played a vital role in creating civilization, I recommend you continue to read other works. Study Greek history. Find out more about the individual gods and goddesses. In all those details, you might find patterns that may reveal clues to what really happened so very long ago.

Thank you and good luck with your continued learning!

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Preview of Greek Mythology

A Captivating Guide to the Ancient Gods, Goddesses, Heroes and Monsters

Introduction

Any book on ancient mythology gives us a glimpse into the minds of civilization's pioneers. They were the brave adventurers who explored the unknown territory of possibilities. For them, civilization was yet a mysterious realm with countless directions to go.

Nature is frequently brutal, especially in the cooler climate of an ongoing Ice Age. But the founders of civilization took up the challenge and made the best with what nature had to offer.

We humans got lucky with our current interglacial (warmer phase of an Ice Age) called the Holocene. It started with a rapid warming of +7°C in a period as short as 30 years. This makes our modern, meager warming look weak by comparison. Some interglacial periods have lasted as little as 4,000 years. Ours is already 11,600 years old. All of the Holocene's additional energy gave humans far more life-giving warmth, more essential rain for growing crops and even a boost in carbon dioxide to nudge levels away from the near-extinction levels of the last glacial period.

Understanding the environment of early civilization helps us to appreciate more completely the rugged individualism of those original thinkers. They experienced hardships that most of us could not begin to imagine in the relative comfort of our modern lifestyles.

Even our modern survivalists have it easy compared to those founders of civilization. A survivalist may have tools not available to the humans of 6,000 to 12,000 years ago. At the very least, today's survivalists have knowledge of what is possible that those early primitives could never have dreamed of. They know how things work. Those early humans could only

guess. And their guesses were sometimes horribly wrong—even superstitious.

Gods and Monsters

Certainly, a primitive people could come up with a great many wild and strange explanations for the behavior of nature—both the regular cycles and the unique events.

But what if some of the unique events were man made? This is a question that has plagued researcher Rod Martin, Jr. most of his life. Many of the odd and seemingly impossible traits of the ancient gods and monsters become more reasonable when viewed through the lens of a primitive vocabulary. Imagine, for instance, showing a primitive hunter-gatherer a jet aircraft taking off. To them, it might be described as a screaming bird with its wings or tail on fire. An eighteen-wheeler barreling down the highway might become a roaring beast with two bright eyes and a multitude of legs which moved too quickly to be seen clearly.

Historians have long suspected that the mythical centaur may merely have been a human rider on horseback. To the ancient who had never seen a horse and rider, the shock of first contact might have left them unable to grasp such details as two heads and six legs—two legs for the human and four for the horse.

Archaeologists have evidence that peoples who lived north of the Black Sea rode on horseback as early as 6000 to 4000 BC, but we can in no way declare that it is the earliest instance of horse riders. All we can state with any certainty is that this is the earliest known, verifiable instance of horse riders. There is always the possibility that there may have been earlier instances, even if all evidence of such has been destroyed.

Consider for a moment the possibility that an ancient, technological civilization existed long before our own history began. Leggings might become “goat legs” and boots might be seen as “hooves” to the primitive who had never before seen such things. A helmet with horns on top might complete the image of a satyr, or the immortal god Pan.

A patriarchal empire might be understood as a “god,” and a matriarchal empire would thus be viewed as a “goddess.” Or it might be that factions

within an empire might be viewed as individual gods who have the traits of their leaders.

Such a view of myth might not necessarily apply to all of the old stories, but we have to remain prepared for such possibilities when we're searching for answers.

What's Ahead

The broad arc of this book takes us from the dim beginnings of creation as seen in the Greek mythology. We move through the birth of Titans, their overthrow by the Olympian gods, the gods' dealings with mortals like Paris of Troy, the destruction of Atlantis, Jason and the Golden Fleece, the Trojan War, and into historical times.

This book includes some of the standard views of Greek myth and history, but also tantalizes your imagination with the possibilities that lay behind myth and legend. We won't cover every possible version of every myth, but by the time you're finished with this book, you will have a good appreciation for the nature of Greek mythology and the gods, monsters, and heroes which populate it.

Chapter 1 — Uranus: Betrayal by Cronus

In the very beginning, Chaos (void) ruled the universe. It was the great nothingness. Boring? Of course. Perhaps the sheer blandness of all that empty nothingness forced Gaia (goddess of Earth) to spring into existence from all that emptiness. Close behind, Chaos gave birth to Tartarus (god of the underworld), Eros (god of fertility), Erebus (god of darkness) and Nyx (goddess of night).

Gaia (mother Earth) was so full of fertility that she gave birth to two other primordial gods without having to mate with anyone. Of course, Chaos had no gender, and the universe was relatively empty. Her two sons were named Uranus (god of heaven) and Pontus (god of the ocean).

Feeling lonely, Gaia took her son, Uranus, as her mate. Each night, her son would lay on top of her and mate with her. From these repeated unions, she gave birth to several Titans and monsters. These included Cronus (sometimes spelled Kronos), Oceanus, Tethys, Rhea, Hyperion, Theia, Cruis, Themis, Coeus, Mnemosyne, Iapetus, Phoebe, the Cyclopes, and the Hecatonchires.

To the Greeks, heaven was selfish. He had a unique relationship with Earth and assumed that he was king of the gods. Was that arrogance? Was it that the other gods didn't care who called themselves "king?" Perhaps so, because nothing is mentioned of any conflict until Uranus started to abuse his children.

Uranus gave selfish love to his mate (his mother and wife). There was passion, but there was also disgust for the children his wife gave him. The youngest of these—the Hecatonchires and Cyclopes—he ended up locking away in his uncle, Tartarus (underworld)—far below the surface of Gaia.

For some reason, Uranus considered these youngest to be particularly hideous. The Hecatonchires, for instance, were three man-like giants, but each with a hundred hands, fifty heads, and massive strength. The Cyclopes were three giants, each with one eye in the centers of their foreheads.

Cousins, Nieces, and Nephews

Over the ages, the universe became more crowded with additional gods and goddesses. The primordial Erebus and Nyx got together and made Aether (God of Light) and Hemera (Goddess of Day). The Titans had some fun, too. Oceanus took his sister, Tethys, and they together created Amphrite, Dione, Metis, Pleione, Thetis and hundreds of additional, second generation Titans.

Iapetus married one of his nieces—the Oceanid, Clymene—and they together created Atlas, Prometheus, and several others.

Hyperion took his sister, Theia, and they created Helios (sun), Eos (dawn) and Selene (moon).

Coeus married his sister, Phoebe (“shining”) and they created Leto who later became the mother of Artemis and Apollo.

Gaia Fed Up with Abuse

Mother Earth became sickened by the abuses of Uranus. She didn’t want any more children by that selfish, self-centered tyrant.

From her own body, she plucked a shard of flint and fashioned a great sickle. But the only harvest she had in mind was to reap from Uranus his testicles. This is an ironic concept. Everything else about the earliest gods of the universe—the primordials—is devoid of anything anthropomorphic (man-like). But here, Uranus has the very human physical attribute of male testes.

Perhaps Gaia was a coward for not doing the deed herself, or perhaps she felt that one of her sons would be more capable of finishing the task. She ended up asking all her sons to take up the great sickle. But even her sons were too cowardly to face up to the Great God King Uranus—all except Cronus.

Cronus was the youngest of the first generation Titans. In other words, he was only slightly older than the brothers imprisoned in Tartarus. Perhaps being the youngest who remained free made him struggle harder to keep up with his older siblings. And perhaps, being only slightly older than his imprisoned brothers made him more aware of his own vulnerabilities. Maybe these traits gave him sufficient ambition to overcome any fear.

But Cronus was clever and shrewd. He wasn't one to jump into a task blindly. After all, he did want to survive the attack on his father—heaven itself. So, Cronus hid and ambushed his father, completing the castration and spilling the god's blood onto the Earth (Gaia). From the blood sprang the Giants, the Meliae, and the Furies (Erinyes). Later, the Meliae would give birth to the earliest form of humans.

Tired and disgusted from the task, Cronus tossed his father's genitals into the ocean (Pontus). Such potent energy remained in the godly organ that the sea whipped up an extreme froth (sea foam, *aphros*) and from it was born Aphrodite Ourania (goddess of spiritual love).

Uranus groaned in agony at the betrayal and condemned all of those of his children who were currently visible—the ones not in Tartarus—calling his sons, "Titanes Theoi," which means "straining gods." From this curse, we get the word "Titan."

With Uranus made impotent, the Hecatonchires and Cyclopes were freed from Tartarus. Gaia was relieved that her youngest sons were finally liberated.

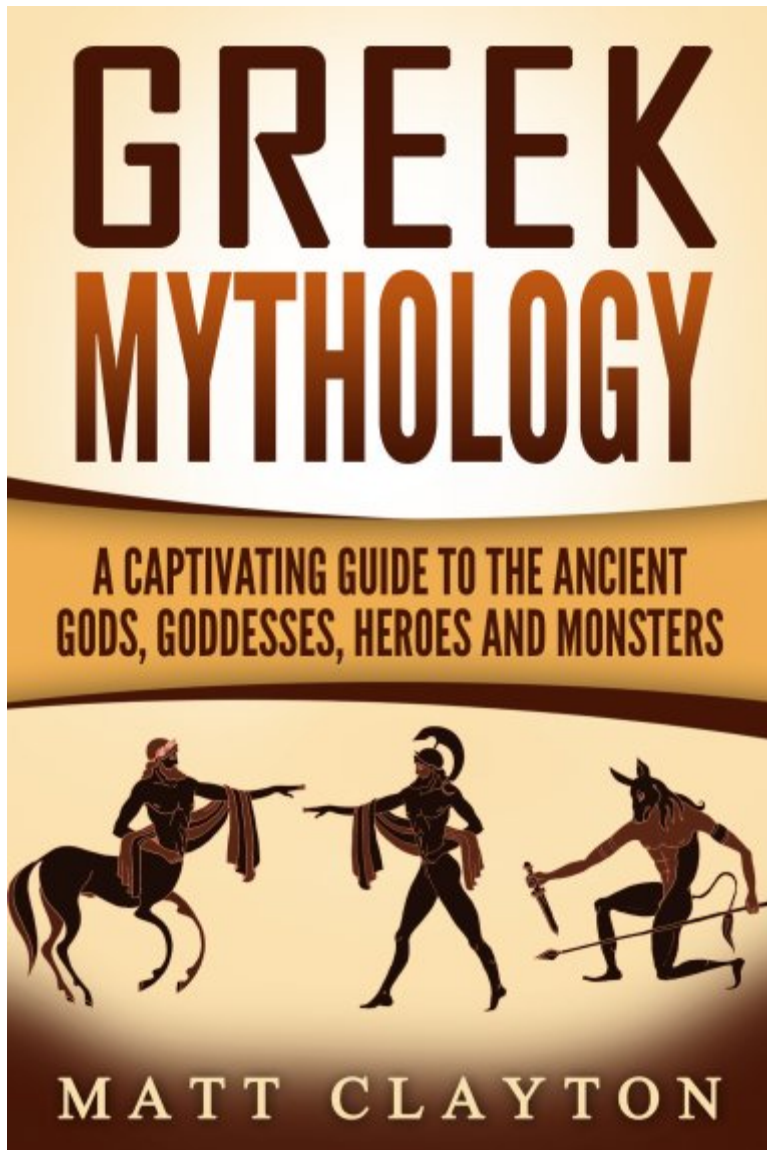
Cronus, feeling the ambitious pride swell within him, took advantage of the situation and claimed the universe as his own. He now became the new king of the gods.

But Cronus had not performed the task requested by his mother and grandmother, Gaia, in order to free his younger brothers. Quite the contrary, Cronus despised the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires as much as his father and brother, Uranus, did. At the first opportunity, Cronus put his six younger brothers back in Tartarus, greatly angering his mother at the betrayal.

Despite his arrogance and cruelty, in some respects, Cronus's rule was viewed as a Golden Age. During his time as king of the gods, the Meliae gave birth to the first humans. These men lived for thousands of years but maintained a youthful appearance. This was a time of tranquility and nobility of spirit, and the young, fragile race of humans mingled with the gods.

With his scythe, Cronus became associated with the harvest and its celebration. His rule was filled with abundance.

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Preview of Egyptian Mythology

Captivating Stories of the Gods, Goddesses, Monsters and Mortals

Introduction: Egypt in Context

Mention the name “Egypt” to most anyone with at least a high school education and it conjures up pictures of the desert, the Nile, palm trees, pyramids and the Sphinx. Today, Egypt is a third-world country rich with petroleum (16% of the nation’s economy in 2011), tourism (20%) and industry (20%). The country even makes a substantial income (3%) from their Suez Canal which allows shipping to bypass having to go around Africa for transporting goods between Europe and the Far East.

For the first three thousand years of humanity’s shared history, Egypt played a pivotal role in the affairs of man. Its Nile Valley and Delta were one of the cradles of civilization where an organized and settled society was born. The other cradles were found in,

- Mesopotamia—surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (modern Iraq),
- Indus Valley—surrounding the Indus River (modern Pakistan),
- China—surrounding the Yellow River,
- Central Andes (modern Peru), and
- Mesoamerica.

Of these six, Egypt and Mesopotamia compete for first place. Both of these regions also vie for first as the birthplace of writing. The Andes and Indus River regions came hundreds of years later. And the earliest known inklings of civilization came more than a thousand years later in China and Mesoamerica.

Humans have been around for at least 200,000 years, so why did civilization start in six different locations so closely spaced in time? It all has to do with climate change.

Egypt and Climate

Egypt has been a nation in one form or another for over five thousand years, all because of the prosperity afforded it by the Nile River and the yearly flooding which made it a center of agriculture. But it wasn't always this way.

We live in an Ice Age which started 2.6 million years ago when both poles had gained ice which persisted throughout the year. Our current interglacial, the Holocene, is one of the dozens of interglacials this Ice Age has seen.

Interglacial periods are relatively short spans of comparative warmth where the polar glaciation recedes. The average interglacial, according to climate scientist W.S. Broecker, is about 11,000 years long. The Holocene is already at least 11,500 years old, so it is older than average. Glacial periods are far longer, averaging 90,000 years in duration. Glacials are brutal on life. Not only is life hard hit by the cold, but cooler oceans make rain scarce, so plants and animals easily die of thirst. Cooler oceans also make carbon dioxide far more scarce in the atmosphere, making it harder for plants to grow.

In the 60s and early 70s, Dr. James Lovelock explored the notion of a lower limit for CO₂ below which plant life would start to die out. In fact, 15,000 BC, CO₂ levels came to within 30 parts-per-million of Lovelock's threshold for mass extinction. Rod Martin, Jr. discusses this in his book, *Red Line—Carbon Dioxide*. Then, about 10,000 BC, massive global warming suddenly made civilization possible. It did this not only by creating more life-affirming warmth, but also by making rain more abundant, and by forcing dissolved carbon dioxide from the oceans back into the atmosphere. All three of these ingredients—warmth, rain and CO₂—made agriculture possible. Without these, growing food on a large scale would have been next to impossible.

Widespread rain was not immediately available, but rain in the highlands of Africa made the Nile River more abundant with water. There have been

signs of early agriculture in the Lower Nile Valley as far back as 9,000 BC, but these did not seem to persist. The early part of the Holocene interglacial saw a period of about 3,000 years that was far warmer than our modern warm period—The Holocene Optimum. That greater warmth not only evaporated more water from the oceans, making rain more abundant, a monsoon pattern developed which regularly watered the Sahara, making it green for nearly three millennia. When the Earth cooled, the Sahara once again became a deep, harsh desert. Nomads sought sources of water, many of them settling in the Nile Valley. Not long afterward, the population grew sufficiently to start off what we know of as civilization.

Science and Humility

There is a great deal we do not know about the past, including about Egypt. Not every bit of writing, and not every artifact has been unearthed. And that pertains only to the objects which remain available for us to find. There may be large portions of the past for which evidence no longer exists.

Scientists are required to hold restraint on that great unknown. They call their attitude “skepticism,” but this is not quite accurate, according to science philosopher, Rod Martin, Jr. The active ingredients in discovery are restraint, humility and a hunger to know the relative truth of a topic. Scientific method tells us that we should remain unbiased, yet skepticism contains the potent, negative bias of doubt. This works well to counterbalance the natural, positive bias found in fresh college graduates. Many of us fancy ourselves as great problem solvers, but too frequently our first inclinations are wrong simply because we don’t yet have sufficient information. Skepticism helps to keep us from jumping to an early conclusion, but it’s still a bias.

According to Martin, unfortunately, objective skepticism frequently descends into subjective forms like unsupported dismissiveness and even self-indulgent ridicule. These only get in the way of discovery.

What does this have to do with Egypt? Currently, the study of ancient Egypt “belongs” to a club of self-proclaimed Egyptology experts. If you don’t belong to this club, the Egyptian government will frown upon independent investigations. Naturally, this benefits the field by helping to keep it neat

and tidy, but new discoveries are quite often anything but orderly. Anyone entertaining wildly new ideas not held by club members is dismissed quite frequently without the need for rigorous support for that dismissal. In other words, even good evidence can become dismissed simply because it doesn't fit the current dogma. This more self-indulgent and subjective form of skepticism quashes discovery and the advancement of science.

This is not merely a problem in Egyptology. All sciences suffer some form of this malady of blind skepticism. North American Anthropology, for instance, endured decades of the "Clovis First" dogma. Scientists were cautioned not to dig below the Clovis horizon (earliest stratum of artifacts found in Clovis, New Mexico). Otherwise, they would be ridiculed and sometimes blocked from receiving funding. Ironically, proof that Clovis was not first would naturally be at lower levels than the Clovis horizon. Such ridicule became an active impediment to scientific progress.

In his bestselling book, *Fingerprints of the Gods*, Graham Hancock notes the work of Robert Schoch in analyzing the Great Sphinx of Giza from a geological perspective. Schoch had noticed that the enclosing wall and core body of the Sphinx had near-vertical erosion patterns consistent with heavy rainfall. But the Sphinx sits at the edge of the Sahara Desert. There has been no consistently heavy rainfall at the Sphinx for at least 6,000 years—ever since the Holocene Optimum. This could mean that the Sphinx and its retaining wall were built thousands of years before the first historical dynasty.

What does this all mean? Any scientist needs to keep an open mind. They need to use restraint not only on accepting new ideas but also on rejecting them, too. Also, it means they need to remain open to rejecting old ideas if new evidence demands such. The key to a proper scientific attitude is to put the evidence first and current dogma a distant third. Second place belongs to brainstorming and creative, critical thinking and imagination.

Mythology's Possible Roots in Fact

Most texts on interpreting ancient Egyptian mythology talk about philosophical metaphors. The figures in myth are taken as metaphors for

something found in ordinary life. But Rod Martin, Jr. has suggested that there may be real events and real people behind many of the ancient myths.

Some of the myths, as you will see, sound too incredible to believe. But what if the details of the myths are only symbolically representative of things for which the primitive of 6,000 years ago did not have the adequate vocabulary?

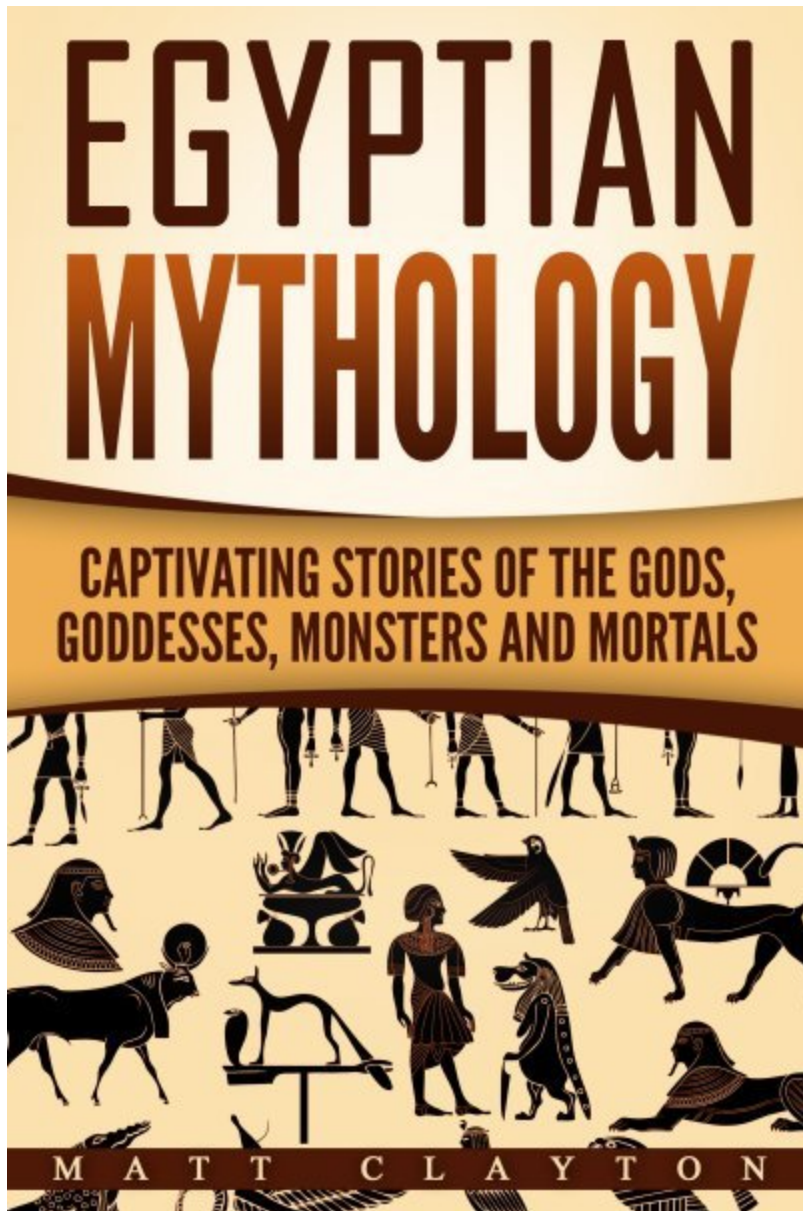
Imagine, for instance, how a primitive hunter-gatherer would describe an empire without having any concept of a nation or tribe. The leader of that empire might become the personification of that nation, and over time, might be described by all of the traits and actions of the empire. Thus, the leader becomes, in the minds of the primitive storyteller, a god or a goddess. Later in the book, we will look through Martin's lens to see what Egyptian mythology might look like as if it were based on real events poorly understood by the chain of storytellers.

What's to Come

The book is broken into three parts:

1. Fantastic Images—Ancient Egyptian myths and legends as we know them today.
2. Factual History—Covering pre-history through classical antiquity.
3. Unraveling Myth—Looking at Egyptian mythology from a fresh perspective.

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Preview of Norse Mythology

Captivating Stories of the Gods, Sagas and Heroes

Introduction: Sources and Overview

I want to thank you and commend you for reading the book, “Norse Mythology: Captivating Stories of the Gods, Sagas and Heroes”.

This book gives an overview of Norse mythology, telling some of the stories of the gods, giants and other creatures of that lost era before history began.

Though the world came to know of the Norse and their legends through Roman interaction about the time of Christ, most of what we came to know was handed down from folk tales gathered by native writers like Snorri Sturluson (c. 1179–1241). This was from a time when the Norse had already been converted to Christianity. Some of what Sturluson wrote was clearly influenced by Christian beliefs of the time. As with all sources, we have to assume at least a little bit of bias was involved. The age of belief in the Norse gods had ended. We can only guess how much of those old beliefs were left out because they may have been incompatible with the new beliefs of Christendom. Sturluson gathered the tales in a work now known as the *Prose Edda*.

Several anonymous writers of the pre-Christian era created poems which have collected in what is now called the *Poetic Edda*. These pre-date Sturluson’s work and thus are far more likely to give us insights into the thinking and attitudes of the early Norse people.

Danish scholar Saxo Grammaticus gave us a Latin language version of Danish history, *Gesta Danorum*, written in the twelfth century. But even earlier, we have more matter-of-fact writing of Roman historian Tacitus in the first century, discussing the tribes of the region they called Germania.

As with most stories, it's best to start at the beginning. And as with any story of gods, we start with the Norse version of creation.

Chapter 1—Norse Creation Story

Like most cultures, the rugged folk of the North have their own myth of creation. For them, it started with Ymir, ancestor of all the giants of Jötunheim. Later, Odin and his two brothers, Vili and Vé, defeated Ymir and formed the world from the giant's carcass— hair for the trees, bones for the hills, blood for the ocean, skull for the heavens, brains for the clouds and eyebrows for the land of humans called Midgard (Middle Earth or Middle Land).

None of the stories are clear about the origins of the three Aesir gods—Odin and his brothers. In some respects, these three are similar to the Greek gods, the brothers Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, who defeated the Titans and replaced them as rulers of the universe.

The universe became a giant tree called Yggdrasil which grew out of a well called Urd. Within the tree's branches and roots resided the Nine Realms.

The name itself comes from Yggr—"The Terrible One"—a name frequently given to Odin. For the well, the name "Urd" meant "destiny."

Norse researcher, Daniel McCoy, describes the two places—Yggdrasil and Urd—as extensions of the Norsemen's concepts of time. The Well of Urd he depicts as a "reservoir of completed or ongoing actions that nourish the tree and influence its growth. Yggdrasil, in turn, corresponds to the present tense, that which is being actualized here and now."

Like many primitive cultures, time is seen as repeating cycles instead of unbounded and linear. The waters of the past seep into the tree, affecting its form. Eventually, this water gathers on the leaves, like the dew, and runs back into the well, thus creating a new present. Those who gain control over this flow are said to possess great magic, because they display "a greater degree of control over destiny."

In Norse philosophy, the power of free will and fate interact, and give birth to reality. Those who were created participate in the creation. To the Christian biblical literalist, such a viewpoint may seem strange and perhaps

even blasphemous. But to researcher Rod Martin, Jr., the notion of Christians being participants in creation is not so unusual. Christ told his followers, for instance, that each of them could do the miracles he did and even greater. Reading again the Bible's Genesis 1:26 with this knowledge in mind, the notion that God created His children to look like him takes on a new meaning—not as gods, but as “baby gods.” In other words, the children of God are not yet mature, but fully capable of creating once they learn well their lessons.

Ice Age Context

A fact not well appreciated in our modern society is that we currently live in an Ice Age interglacial called the Holocene. All of the talk of “global warming” should be welcome news to us all, but somehow warmth has been turned into an evil villain. Norse mythology was borne out of an era of increasing warmth which had made civilization possible. Before then, ice had ruled the climate for something like 90,000 years, and threatens to do so again, today. But even as most of the world came to know agriculture, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland had remained largely buried in ice, at least for hundreds of years.

In their mythology, wild land surrounded civilized territory. In those uncivilized realms, deadly cold still ruled. It took hundreds of years to melt enough of the ice so that land was exposed for growing crops. Memories of those harsher times still persist in the legends. In fact, the earth itself is still adjusting from the end of the last glacial period of the current Ice Age—land today is still rising after being freed from the 90 millennia of continent-crushing, mile-high glaciers. In Sweden, for instance, an inland, coastal lake was once a bay, open to the ocean, only a few hundred years earlier. The land, once crushed by the ice, is still rebounding, albeit somewhat more slowly than the initial elastic bounce some twelve thousand years ago.

Gods of Different Types

First came the giants—wild, uncivilized, and powerful. We will see more of them in chapter 3.

The Vanir are another set of gods in Norse mythology. They are frequently associated with the indigenous folks of the northlands—the first people to

fill the void left by the melting glaciers. Those original folk were later overcome by invading Indo-Europeans.

The Aesir gods are sometimes associated with the conquering invaders who overwhelmed and took in the original inhabitants as their subjects.

Other “Creatures”

Land spirits are powerful beings associated with localized areas of land. From all that was written about them, it’s hard to draw a clear-cut line between them and the gods. In fact, the line separating land spirits from elves, giants and dwarves is equally as blurred.

The land spirits jealously guard the realms they oversee. They easily take offense when someone mistreats the land, and they dish out curses just as easily as blessings.

Elves are also powerful beings, frequently called “luminous.” Freyr, a Vanir god, and honorary Aesir, also seemed to be associated with the elves of Alfheim, possibly even their ruler, for he lived there, instead of in Asgard or Vanaheim. Yet, in some writings the distinction between elves and gods seems clearer and more pronounced.

Dwarves, unlike the common word used in our language, were not short people. At least nothing in the writings of the Norsemen suggests any deficit in height. There was the suggestion of invisibility and perfectly black in appearance. Were they “invisible” because they were black and not easily seen at night? They called the underground of Svartalfheim their home—a place full of mining and forges. Many of the fine artifacts of civilization, used by both gods and men, were forged by these beings. These artifacts included Mjölnir (Thor’s hammer), Skíðblaðnir (Skidbladnir: Freyr’s ship with perpetual fair winds), Gungnir (Odin’s spear), Gleipnir (the chain which bound evil Fenrir when everything else had failed), and many others. Dwarves don’t merely like the darkness; if exposed to the sun’s rays, they immediately turn to stone.

On occasion, dwarves have been labeled “black elves,” so the line between dwarves and elves remains somewhat unclear, as well. Because of their skill with metals, it’s easy to compare the Norse dwarves with the Cyclopes of Greek myth who fashioned great weapons for Zeus, Poseidon, and others.

We cannot help but wonder if the Greeks and Norsemen were talking about the same group of people—blacksmiths who learned an ancient art that was lost and then learned again by the humans at a far later age.

The Norns were three females, each with more power over the path of destiny than any other individual in the universe. They made their home in the Well of Urd, below Yggdrasil. In some versions of myth, they controlled destiny by carving runic symbols into the trunk of the great tree. In other versions, they wove a great tapestry with each strand controlling the life of another. One of these females was named Urd (like the well itself), which comes from the word which means “what once was” in Old Norse. Another was called Verdandi (“what is coming into being”). And the last was called Skuld (“what shall be”). Unlike the Greek fates, the destiny woven by the Norns was much more malleable. It left room for brave individuals to change their own destiny.

Valkyries are the choosers of the fallen. They are female spiritual aides to Odin, who carry dead heroes to Valhalla—a sort of heaven for brave warriors. In more modern times, such as with Wagner’s music—*Ride of the Valkyries*—these divine females have been made to look noble. But they have a darker side. They also choose who will be slain. In fact, they have been portrayed on numerous occasions as downright bloodthirsty. They are extensions of Odin, doing his bidding as if they were appendages of his.

Disir are female spirits who acted as guardians of specific individuals, groups, or places. The Valkyries were sometimes called Odin’s Disir. And like the Valkyries, the Disir could be warlike in nature.

Ask and Embla were the first humans. When two tree trunks washed ashore onto the land which the gods had only recently raised from the ancient waters, Odin and his brothers gave them *önd* (breath or spirit), *óðr* (inspiration or ecstasy), and something called *lá* which has not to this day been translated. The two humans were given Midgard to rule. The man’s name comes from Old Norse, *askr* (“ash tree”) and the wife’s name meant “water pot.” Symbolically, these two names paralleled the functioning of Yggdrasil and Urd—the Great Tree and the Water Well of creation. This imagery emphasizes the fact that one cannot long exist without the other—Yggdrasil and Urd, man and woman.

Sleipnir was an eight-legged horse belonging to Odin. Upon Sleipnir, the chief god made his numerous trips up and down Yggdrasil to visit the Nine Realms, always searching for more knowledge. Sleipnir came into being after Loki had shape shifted into a mare and later became pregnant by a giant's stallion.

Hugin and Munin were two helping spirits in the form of ravens. Their names meant “thought” and “desire,” respectively. As you might have guessed, these two high-flying eyes were helpers of Odin, keeping him informed about events far and wide. Like the Valkyries, Hugin and Munin were semi-autonomous, but also extensions of Odin himself.

Berserkers (*berserkir*) and Ulvhethnar (*úlfheðnar*) were two forms of warrior shamans, each with their own totem animal. Berserkers (“bear shirts”) naturally chose the bear as their symbol. Ulvhethnar (“wolf hide”), on the other hand, chose the wolf as their icon. Both would go into battle, fearlessly not wearing armor or clothes—only an animal mask and pelts—and madly attacking the enemy with wild abandon. In fact, this is where we get the English word *berserk*. In the age of Vikings, Berserkers and Ulvhethnar would inevitably frighten their enemies by their insane actions. It was commonly believed that these warrior shamans would remain unharmed by both iron and fire. Certainly, a warrior's glee for battle would make many a defender timid, even if only for a few seconds. In battle, a few seconds is all that is needed to win in a one-on-one struggle.

The End

Unlike the Greek's and their mythology, the Norse had the end of times already figured out. Their “twilight of the gods” was called Ragnarök—a time when most of the gods would die, and the worlds would suffer greatly all manner of cataclysms. But because of their view of time and nature as cyclic, this big ending would also be a new beginning.

Geography

The realms were loosely divided into two key types—*innangard* and *utangard*. Innangard—“inside the fence”—was considered to include all lands which were law-abiding, orderly and civilized. Utangard—“outside the fence”—on the other hand, referred to realms which were rough, wild, ancient and chaotic.

Only Asgard and Midgard had names which contained the -gard suffix, and thus referred to fortified places of order, protected from the chaos. Asgard was the realm of the Aesir, while Midgard was the realm of humanity. We will see more of these two places and the other seven worlds in the next chapter.

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

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GODS, SAGAS AND HEROES**



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